



# NEWS RELEASE

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## Judicial Council Presents Top Honors to Court Leaders

Monterey—Chief Justice Ronald M. George yesterday presented the Judicial Council of California's highest honors—the Distinguished Service Awards—to four persons who demonstrated extraordinary leadership and made significant contributions to the administration of justice in California. The awards were presented at a judicial conference.

### Jurist of the Year

*This award honors two members of the judiciary for their extraordinary dedication to the highest principles of the administration of justice.*

**Judge J. Richard Couzens**, retired from the Superior Court of Placer County, was honored for his outstanding service as co-leader of a special team of assigned judges that helped reduce the criminal case backlog in Riverside County in 2007 and 2008.

A member of the Judicial Council from 1996 to 2000, Judge Couzens has been instrumental in improving the administration of justice in criminal caseflow management and delay reduction since the early 1990s. He is considered one of the state's foremost experts on criminal law and has served on numerous council committees that have studied those areas. A judge for 27 years, he has participated in the Chief Justice's Assigned Judges Program since his retirement in 2005.

**Supervising Judge David S. Wesley**, of the Superior Court of Los Angeles County, Criminal Division, was chosen for his extraordinary work as the judicial leader of the special team of assigned judges that helped reduce the criminal case backlog in Riverside County.

Judge Wesley is an expert in criminal law and case management in high-volume courts. In addition to hearing criminal cases at the Los Angeles

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trial court, he regularly traveled to Riverside, where he led the assigned judges team and heard criminal cases.

He is a member of the Judicial Council's Advisory Committee on Criminal Jury Instructions, which rewrote California's criminal jury instructions. He also serves on the Task Force on Judicial Selection and Retention and the council's Criminal Law Advisory Committee.

### **Judicial Administration Award**

*This award honors individuals in judicial administration for significant contributions to and leadership in their profession.*

**Sharol Strickland**, executive officer of the Superior Court of Butte County, has demonstrated innovative and outstanding leadership by improving the administration of justice in Butte County and throughout the state, especially through her service on the Judicial Council of California and its committees. She is known for her principles and courage in speaking out on important issues that affect statewide court administration.

Ms. Strickland rose from the ranks of a clerk/typist in the Superior Court of Sonoma County to the top administrative position in the Superior Court of Butte County. Since 1995, she has served as executive officer, clerk of the court, and jury commissioner of the Butte County superior court. As executive officer, Ms. Strickland has created an atmosphere of excellence at the superior court. She has increased public access and public confidence in the court, expanded public services, enhanced technology, and created new opportunities for continuing education and professional development for all staff.

### **Bernard E. Witkin Amicus Curiae Award**

*This award honors individuals other than members of the judiciary for their outstanding contributions to the courts of California.*

**Kenneth W. Babcock**, executive director and general counsel of the Public Law Center in Santa Ana, was honored for his extraordinary work to improve access to justice to low-income residents of Orange County and throughout the state.

Mr. Babcock has devoted most of his professional life to providing legal services to those who cannot afford them. As a member of the California Commission on Access to Justice, 2006–present, he chairs the commission's Funding Committee and serves on the Executive Committee and the Pro Bono Task Force. He is the legal services representative on the commission, having been recommended by a vote of all 100 recipients of the State Bar's

Legal Services Trust Fund Program. He has also been an active member of the Bench-Bar Coalition and received that group's 2007 Legal Services Participant Award.

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*The Judicial Council is the policymaking body of the California courts, the largest court system in the nation. Under the leadership of the Chief Justice and in accordance with the California Constitution, the council is responsible for ensuring the consistent, independent, impartial, and accessible administration of justice. The Administrative Office of the Courts carries out the official actions of the council and ensures leadership and excellence in court administration.*